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SUBJECT: CODEL SKELTON'S MEETING WITH PRIME MINISTER
NETANYAHU

Classified By: DCM Luis G. Moreno, Reason 1.4 (b) (d)

11. (C) Summary. CODEL Skelton met with Prime Minister Netanyahu November 16 at the Prime Minister's office in Jerusalem. Their discussion covered Netanyahu's meeting with President Obama the previous week, Netanyahu's interest in resuming negotiations with the Palestinians, the Iranian nuclear program and options for tougher sanctions, possible negotiations with Syria, U.S.-Israeli cooperation on missile defense, and Israel's objections to the Goldstone Report. Netanyahu said his meeting with the President was the best meeting that they have had. He stressed that he had told the President that he is ready to negotiate with Abu Mazen now, and contrasted Israel's position with the PA's setting of preconditions for negotiations. Netanyahu listed steps the GOI has taken to support Abu Mazen, noting that the PA is "doing a good job" on security. A nuclear Iran, however, would "wash away" all progress as well as undermining Israel's peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan. Netanyahu said that Iran is vulnerable to sanctions and urged the U.S. to increase the pressure on Iran, with likeminded countries if Russia and China will not support new sanctions in the Security Council. Netanyahu commented that there is broader Arab and European support for tough sanctions than in the past, although the Arabs may not say so publicly. Netanyahu praised President Obama's commitment to missile defense, and commented that U.S.-Israeli cooperation on missile defense sends a strong signal to Israel's enemies. He thanked the CODEL for the Congress' support. Netanyahu said Israel faces three main threats: Iran's nuclear program, the build-up of rockets and missiles in Lebanon, Syria and Gaza, and the Goldstone Report, which condemned Israel for defending its civilian population from years of rocket attacks. Netanyahu said Israel will need to ensure that a future Palestinian state cannot launch rockets at Israel's international airport or critical facilities. End Summary.

Let's Get on with Negotiations

12. (U) CODEL Skelton, consisting of House Armed Services Committee Chairman Ike Skelton (D, MO) and Mrs. Skelton, Representative Steve Israel (D-NY), Representative Tim Murphy (R, PA), Congressional Staff members Phil McNaughton, Michael Casey, and John Wason, Military aides Colonel Jeff Koch and PolCouns met with Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu November 16. Netanyahu was joined by Deputy National Security Adviser Rear Admiral (reserve) Avriel Bar Josef, media adviser Mark Regev, policy adviser Ari Harrow, and a Congressional liaison officer from the Israeli Embassy in Washington.

13. (C) Netanyahu began the meeting by noting his appreciation for his meeting with President Obama at the White House the previous week. Netanyahu described his conversation with the President as "the best we've had so far." He said that regarding negotiations with the Palestinians, he told the President, "let's get on with it."

Netanyahu stated that his government had removed hundreds of obstacles and roadblocks in the West Bank, helping the West Bank economy achieve a seven percent growth rate, adding "and we can kick it up to ten percent growth." Netanyahu said his Bar Ilan address last June had been difficult for him, but it had united Israelis in support of accepting a demilitarized Palestinian state. The current GOI had also restrained construction in settlements more than its past several predecessors.

14. (C) Netanyahu then contrasted his efforts with the PA, which he said is maintaining a "political and economic boycott" of Israel, setting preconditions for negotiations, supporting the Goldstone Report in the UN, and is now talking about a unilateral declaration of independence. Israel wants to engage, but the Palestinians do not. Netanyahu quoted a Palestinian official as saying that the PA had "exhausted the negotiating process," then noted that the Palestinians have not even started to talk to his government. The real difference, he pointed out, is that Abu Mazen is facing elections, while Israel has already conducted its elections. Netanyahu also commented that the Palestinians had initially expected the U.S. to "deliver Israel" on all of their demands, but are now realizing that this will not happen. President Obama understands, he stated, that Israel is ready to move forward. The alternatives to negotiations are bad for everyone. Netanyahu said that if Abu Mazen would engage, they would confront all the issues. The process would not be easy, but it has to get started.

15. (C) Netanyahu said the West Bank had remained quiet during Operation Cast Lead because the Palestinians do not

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want to live under Hamas' rule. He asserted that according to recent polls, Abu Mazen and Fatah would easily win an election, even in Gaza. Netanyahu stressed that he was not pushing for the Palestinians to hold elections, but was instead focused on promoting the expansion of the West Bank economy by removing both physical and bureaucratic obstacles.

He acknowledged that the PA is "doing a good job" on security, though he added that PA leaders are not aware of everything Israel is doing to support the PA's security. If we could add a political process to the cooperation that currently exists, we could get security, economic development, and peace. Netanyahu warned, however, that if Iran gets a nuclear bomb, the peace process would be "washed away." Even Israel's peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan would come under enormous pressure.

Iran Sanctions

16. (C) Chairman Skelton noted that his Committee is following Iran closely. Netanyahu said he had advised the President to stick to the deadline on the TRR offer, adding that it is also important to ask Iran to stop its enrichment activities. Netanyahu commented that there is a new mood in the major European capitals in support of sanctions. The U.S. does not need to depend on the Security Council, but can work with likeminded countries. Sanctions should focus on Iran's importation of gasoline, while also focusing on opening up the information networks. The U.S. should lead the world toward tougher sanctions, or more of the Arab states will start appeasing Iran, as Qatar is doing. Netanyahu summed up his advice as: "stick to the deadline, be firm on the terms, and apply sanctions" if Iran does not comply. He thought Russia may be more inclined than in the past, but it would be best not to count on the Security Council. Having set a deadline, the P5 1 should stick to it.

The Western powers at least will go along. We should close the gap between understanding the problem and acting on it, he said. Netanyahu said Israel's problems with Iran are not limited to its nuclear program. Even without a nuclear umbrella, Iran is sending hundreds of tons of weapons to Syria, Hamas and Hizballah. The ship seized November 3 by

the Israeli Navy had on board two thirds of the amount of rockets fired at Israel during the 2006 Lebanon War.

17. (C) Representative Israel asked Netanyahu about the timetable for Iran to achieve a nuclear weapon. Netanyahu responded that Iran has the capability now to make one bomb or they could wait and make several bombs in a year or two. It is important to bear in mind that the Iranian regime was exposed as a fraud during their presidential elections. The Iranian people detest the regime and have shown great courage in the streets. The exposure of the Qom facility also helped convince doubters in the international community that Iran has a weapons program. Iran has a weak economy and a fractured political system, so it is vulnerable to sanctions. The time to act diplomatically is now, Netanyahu said, adding that we still have a year or two to stop the Iranian program. Netanyahu said he thought President Obama understands Iran perfectly. The Arab leaders hope Iran will be stopped, there is broad Arab and European support for "vigorous steps." Chairman Skelton asked whether the Arabs would state their support publicly. Netanyahu replied they might not, but it would not make a large difference since the Arab "street" will not rise up in support of the Iranian regime.

Ready to Talk to Syria

18. (C) Regarding Syria, Netanyahu urged the U.S. to press Damascus to stop supplying arms to Hizballah. Noting that he had stopped in Paris to meet President Sarkozy on his way back to Israel from Washington, Netanyahu confirmed media reports that Sarkozy had offered to mediate between Israel and Syria. Netanyahu said he would prefer direct negotiations with the Syrians, but added that he would accept France as a mediator. President Assad, however, still wants Turkey as the mediator. Noting that Turkish PM Erdogan had recently stated that he would prefer to meet with Sudanese President Omar Bashir than with Netanyahu, Netanyahu asked how the Turks could be fair mediators.

Working Together on Missile Defense

19. (C) Netanyahu said that in addition to peace with the Palestinians and Iran, he and the President had discussed joint U.S.-Israeli efforts on missile defense. Netanyahu

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commented that he had personally visited the Juniper Cobra joint military exercise. The program has reached a phase at which it is possible to monitor incoming missiles with a good lead-time, but it is still very expensive to intercept "crude rockets" such as those fired from Gaza. The information shield is moving ahead nicely, but the physical shield is lagging behind. Netanyahu observed that it is very important for the U.S. and its allies to be able to defend themselves against missile attack. Chairman Skelton noted that U.S. personnel who briefed the CODEL were very optimistic about the program. Netanyahu said only the U.S. and Israel are currently working on missile defense. This cooperation sends a powerful message to Israel's enemies he noted, and thanked the CODEL and the Congress for their support.

Goldstone Report a Key Threat

110. (C) Netanyahu commented that Israel currently faces three principal threats: Iran's nuclear program, missile proliferation and the Goldstone Report. Goldstone gave terrorists immunity to attack Israel if they fire from populated areas. During Cast Lead the IDF sent thousands and flyers, text messages and phone calls to civilians, warning them to get out of the way, yet Israel was accused of war crimes. Hamas and other terrorists fired 12,000 rockets into Israel from Gaza, Netanyahu said, noting that Israel is the

only country in the world faced with threats to annihilate it. Netanyahu asked the CODEL to imagine a situation in which Israeli Air Force pilots must consult with lawyers before they can travel abroad. Former PM Olmert, former FonMin Livni and DefMin Barak could be hauled before the International Criminal Court. Netanyahu said he could not accept that IDF soldiers could be charged with war crimes for protecting their country from constant attack. The deaths of several hundred civilians in Gaza was "tragic," Netanyahu said, but there was no deliberate targeting of civilians by Israel. Deliberate targeting of civilians is a war crime, but what should Israel do when terrorists deliberately target Israeli civilians and then hide within their civilian population?

11. (U) CODEL Skelton did not clear this cable.
CUNNINGHAM